

# Conversations for Scotland

## Review of National Outcomes: call for evidence

June 2023

This response is submitted on behalf of a consortium of organisations who are interested in improving the quality of citizen engagement in Scotland. Our view is that there needs to be greater citizen engagement in shaping the National Outcomes, and we have designed and tested a model that could help to achieve this. The response has been co-written by Carnegie UK and Dark Matter Labs, but the content is informed by conversations and practical experiments run by a wider group of organisations. The group includes Foundation Scotland, Northumbria University, Oxfam Scotland, Public Health Scotland, SCDC and WEAll Scotland.

### 1. Introduction

We fully agree with the Scottish Government's view that '*our collective wellbeing is a matter for all of us*<sup>1</sup>' and that '*everyone, including public, private and third sector organisations, can contribute towards the National Outcomes through their work*<sup>2</sup>.' However, for many people the connection between the challenges that they face on a day-to-day basis and the pathways for positive change remains unclear. Without distinct, inclusive opportunities for people to explore and discuss the changes they want to see, both communities and policymakers are missing out on the chance to co-create a desirable future for Scotland. Our main challenge to this Review is therefore as follows:

**If the request is for everyone to contribute, how are we making sure that all voices are heard and that people have both the agency and ongoing opportunity to participate meaningfully?**

In our view, engaging people in an ongoing conversation about what matters is a central part of creating an inclusive and vibrant Scotland. However, despite a clear aspiration to embed a participatory approach this vision has yet to be realised. It's clear that good public engagement can enhance Scotland's wellbeing approach by integrating the lived experience of the population, but it requires a legitimate connection to policymaking in order to be credible.

1 <https://consult.gov.scot/national-performance-framework-unit/call-for-evidence/>

2 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-outcomes-review-2023-consultation-information-pack/pages/3/>

At the end of 2022, this group of organisations joined forces to develop a citizen engagement initiative in parallel to the consultation on Scotland's National Outcomes. The overarching goals were, as follows:

- (a) To demonstrate and learn about what good quality conversations about wellbeing could look like;
- (b) To build a flexible framework (including an open source platform and data analysis tools) to facilitate such conversations on an ongoing basis;
- (c) To explore ways of connecting participatory data to future decisions and legislation, linked to the wider aim of mainstreaming wellbeing approaches and understanding.

The initiative came about in response to the Scottish Government's Review of National Outcomes and we are sharing what we have learnt with the call for evidence. However, we have deliberately designed this work outside of the narrow consultation window, as we believe that our emerging findings are relevant to the Scottish Government in multiple contexts. For example, both in the current Review of National Outcomes and to inform future conversations about wellbeing and the future of Scotland.

## 2. The rationale for a new model for citizen engagement

The group of organisations that came together have a broad interest in engagement and participation, spanning expertise in community development; experience of designing workshops to inform cornerstone indicators and wellbeing frameworks; and academic research on participation in governance. There were also several organisations which had been involved in public engagement activities in 2016-17, as part of the previous review of National Outcomes.

From these different perspectives, the group established a shared understanding about the importance of citizen<sup>3</sup> engagement. When done well, it can have a positive impact on community wellbeing in and of itself, through promoting dialogue, strengthening agency, and building trust in decision makers<sup>45</sup>. It can also generate a much richer understanding about the wellbeing priorities of different groups, thus supporting better policy making. Good citizen engagement is therefore a central component of a successful wellbeing approach.

Our hope was that the 2023 Review of National Outcomes would build on what had been done in 2016-17, in line with what has been learnt about participative practices in the intervening six years. We were disappointed that the resources allocated to the Review were not sufficient to undertake public engagement on the National Outcomes and on wellbeing to the depth and extent that we would have hoped. As a result, we decided to pool our own resources to prototype and test a more ambitious approach to engagement that we hope will be of value to future conversations, in Scotland and elsewhere.

Over a period of 6 months we have worked together to design a model for 'wellbeing conversations'. The design was centred on three key principles; firstly, we wanted these

3 Throughout this response, we are using the word citizen to represent the inhabitants of Scotland rather than as a statement of nationality or legal status.

4 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13501763.2022.2093947>

5 [https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Measuring-Wellbeing-Series-Mark-Fabian-and-Anna-Alexandrova\\_v2.pdf](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Measuring-Wellbeing-Series-Mark-Fabian-and-Anna-Alexandrova_v2.pdf)

conversations to be for citizens first and foremost, therefore we framed them in the context of the Scotland that we want for future generations, rather than in response to the National Outcomes. Secondly, we wanted the model to be inclusive, so we designed it to enable as many people as possible to use it. Finally, our aspiration was to enable a continuous and generative national conversation, rather than something that happens once every five years.

As of June 2023, we have run a test phase of the conversations. We now plan to spend time thinking about how we can roll it out in a way that offers widespread opportunities for diverse people across Scotland to participate. Even at this early stage, the test phase has generated learning that is relevant to the Review's call for evidence, both about the process of citizen engagement and preliminary findings regarding the wellbeing priorities for different people in Scotland. The remainder of this submission goes into further detail about the process that we have developed, together with what we have learnt so far.

### 3. Building and testing the 'Conversations for Scotland'

#### 3.1. The Conversations for Scotland tool

Using the outputs from the collaborative discussions as a base, together with previously tested good practice in both national and international contexts, we have created an open source and flexible community engagement tool which we have called *Conversations for Scotland*. The tool was deliberately designed to have a simple and approachable format, so that anyone who wants to can run a workshop in their community. The main elements of the tool are as follows:

- **Invitations**  
A sample of the workshop invitations can be found [here](#) and the format is adaptable for any community to use.
- **Questionnaires**  
We have created an online pre-workshop [questionnaire](#) to gather preliminary data on people's views to help focus and personalise the workshops.
- **Playbook**  
A comprehensive [playbook](#) is available as a website or as a downloadable document. The playbook contains everything needed to host interesting, inclusive and thought provoking conversations.
- **Workshops**  
The playbook website provides clear, easy to follow instructions to run two standalone workshops. The [first workshop](#) is centred on what matters most to people, both individually and in their communities. The [second workshop](#) is more future focussed and guides participants through some scenarios, based on their specific communities and needs.

#### 3.2 Who we consulted

The test phase workshops were held in four diverse communities. They were supported by Foundation Scotland and the groups were facilitated by Dark Matter Labs, Foundation Scotland and SCDC. The communities that took part were as follows:

- Cramond, Edinburgh hosted by Dark Matter Labs;
- Craigshill, Livingston hosted by SCDC;

- A mixed group comprising representatives of community organisations from three communities in East Ayrshire and one community in Dumfries and Galloway, hosted by Foundation Scotland;
- Grampian Opportunities, Inverurie hosted by SCDC.

## 4. What we have learnt so far

The test phase of Conversations for Scotland has generated valuable learning to date. This relates both to the process of delivering engagement activities and the preliminary findings that have emerged from the workshops themselves.

### 4.1 Learning about the citizen engagement model

Facilitators were asked to provide feedback on the workshop materials (what worked well and what could be improved) and on the way that the workshop was received by participants. Because workshops were facilitated by organisations involved in the project, there are caveats to these findings. Notwithstanding that, a number of things stood out.

First, that there is an appetite for this kind of conversation. Across the board, people engaged enthusiastically and some groups were interested to meet again for follow-up discussions. In addition, there was interest in hosting workshops in this phase of the project from other groups, which didn't materialise due to the short timeframe. When discussing the project in other forums, people have been energised by the idea of taking part. Despite often hearing it said that communities are tired of being asked for their views, our experience is that people want to be a part of these conversations.

Secondly, people responded well to the idea of being part of a national conversation, and particularly to the invitation to think about the future, asking the question "what if?" We will continue to learn about this and adjust our approach accordingly. However, the initial sense is that framing the workshop in a long-term and aspirational way, feels different and more engaging than other more immediate consultative exercises.

That said, sometimes it was noted that it was hard for participants to think about the future in a positive way (or at all in some cases) where people faced immediate welfare issues. We will give thought to this, together with a number of other issues that were raised around accessibility and usability, to ensure that these conversations are as inclusive, welcoming and safe as possible. For example, this may include provision for people whose first language is not English, as well as transport and childcare costs.

Finally, facilitators reported better relationships, connections and understanding both with and between participants by the end of the workshop. This indicates that there are benefits to having these conversations for local people and workers on a standalone basis. When coupled with opportunities for using the outputs from these conversations to inform and influence other discussions (either at a local or national level) this further strengthens the case for robust participatory processes.

### 4.2 Preliminary findings from the thematic analysis

Northumbria University analysed the data from the pre-workshop questionnaires and the four in-person workshops. In total, 40 surveys were completed and 32 individuals attended a workshop.

### 4.2.1 Methodology

#### Data collection

The data was obtained from two sources:

- (a) A structured pre-workshop questionnaire: this employed both multiple choice questions and open-ended questions to explore how facets of wellbeing were experienced in participants' lives.
- (b) Workshop outputs: the workshops provided structured, dialogue-based engagement with individual and community wellbeing. Post-it notes were written by participants during the workshops and as the discussions progressed they were placed on a response quadrant with axis labels Now, Future, Optimistic and Fearful.

#### Data analysis

Northumbria University's approach to data analysis sought to uncover the relative significance of the 11 National Outcomes to the experience of participants. It also looked to uncover any significant facets of wellbeing not aligned to the current set. A template analysis approach, tailored to the National Outcomes, was piloted for this purpose. A detailed description of this process is included in Appendix 1 of this document.

### 4.2.2. Preliminary themes identified

We are sharing the emerging themes from the test phase to represent the things that people told us in response to the questionnaires and during the workshops. Given the small sample size, there are clear limitations in terms of using the findings to inform the content of the National Outcomes. However, we think it is interesting to observe the topics that people chose to talk about when we created space for a more open-ended and deliberative conversation, rather than focusing exclusively on the National Outcomes. More broadly, we think that there should be space in policy making to consider and incorporate this kind of qualitative, in-depth evidence.

The themes derived from both the questionnaires and the workshops are still provisional but can be broadly delineated into two key categories:

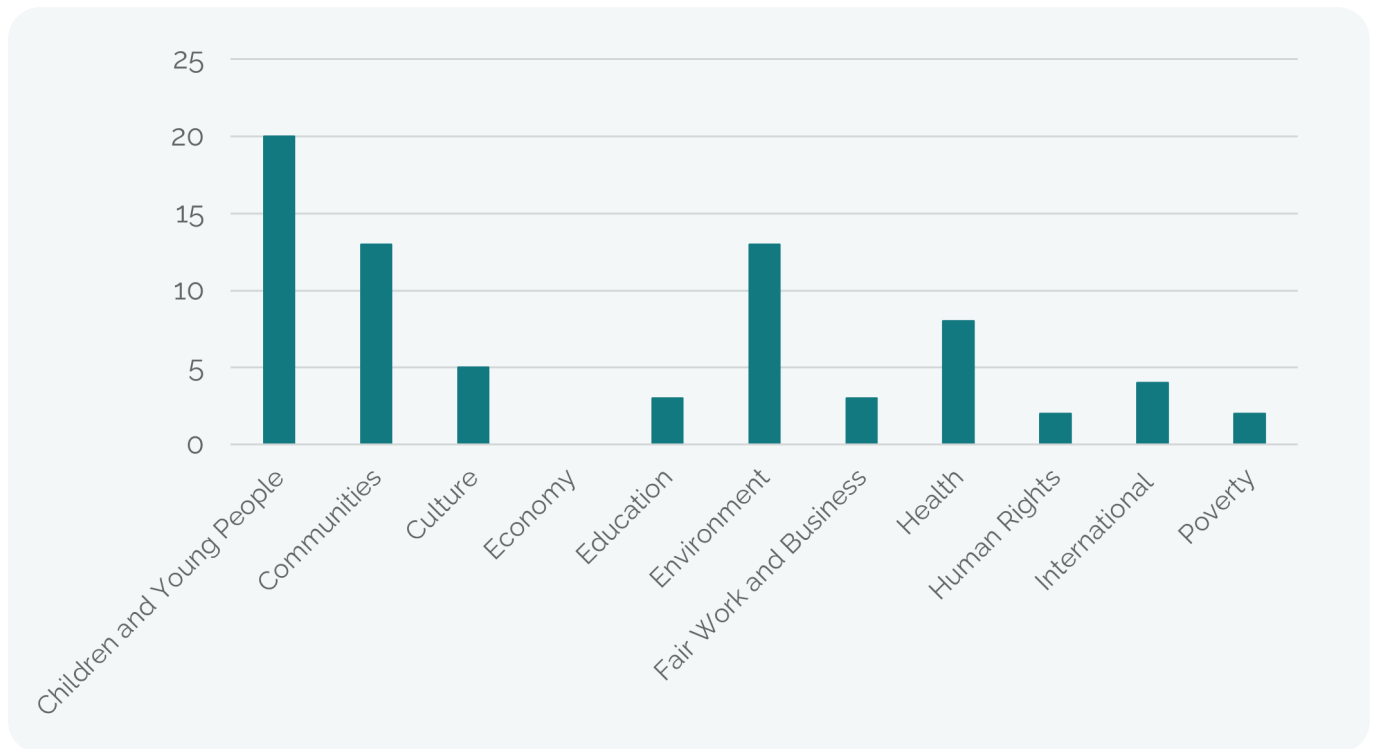
1. Perspectives that align with the National Outcomes thus supporting their validity;
2. Factors that were identified as important but are missing from the National Outcomes, suggesting areas that require further exploration.

#### Perspectives aligned with the National Outcomes

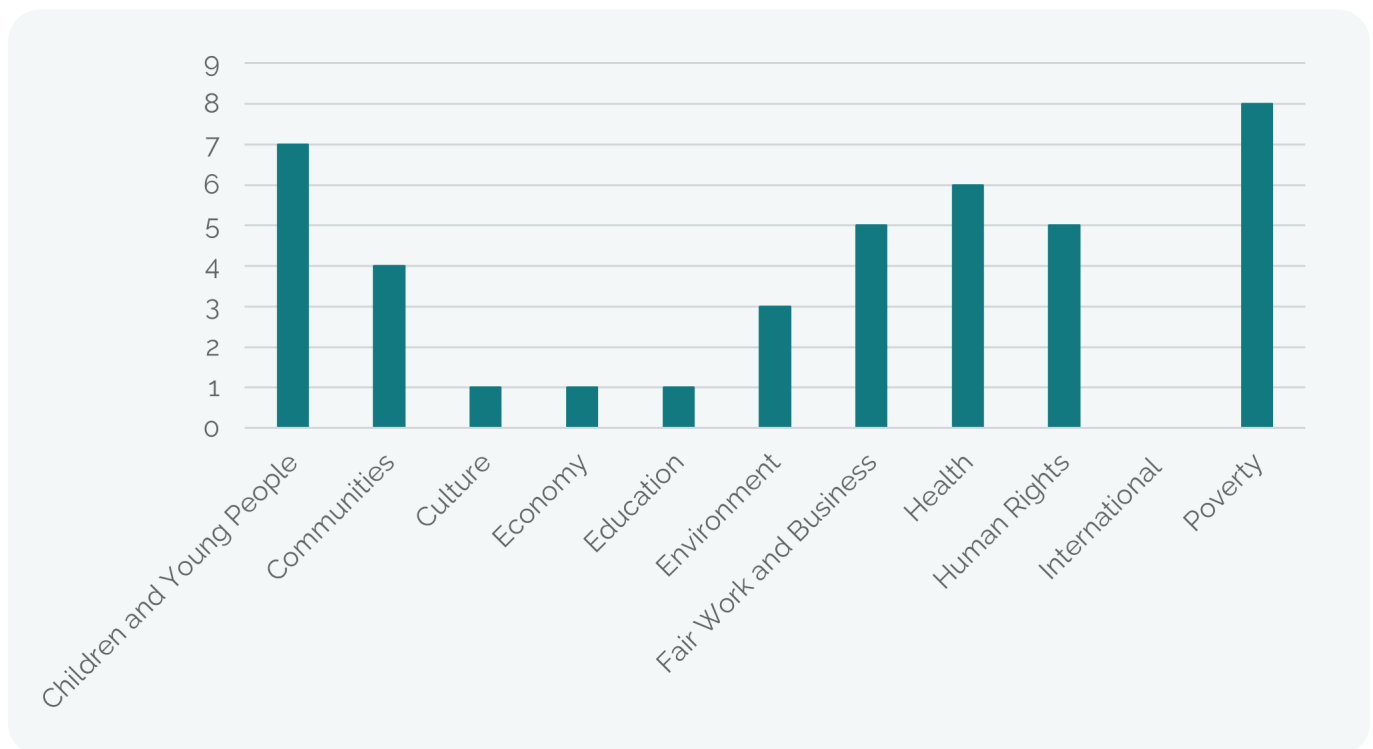
The results from the in-person workshops highlighted the strongest alignment to outcomes relating to communities, the environment, health, human rights, poverty and children and young people. This does not undermine the contribution of other National Outcomes to collective wellbeing in Scotland. However, it does highlight the things that people perceive as important for living a good life, now and in the future. This type of analysis may be useful when thinking about the balance of National Outcomes, such as the way that they are prioritised in policy and spending decisions.

These thematic findings were also prevalent in the pre-workshop questionnaire responses which are summarised below in the following four charts. The results shown represent the total number of times a theme was mentioned across all the workshops and participants.

Q1 What do you enjoy most in your life? Or what brings you joy?<sup>6</sup>

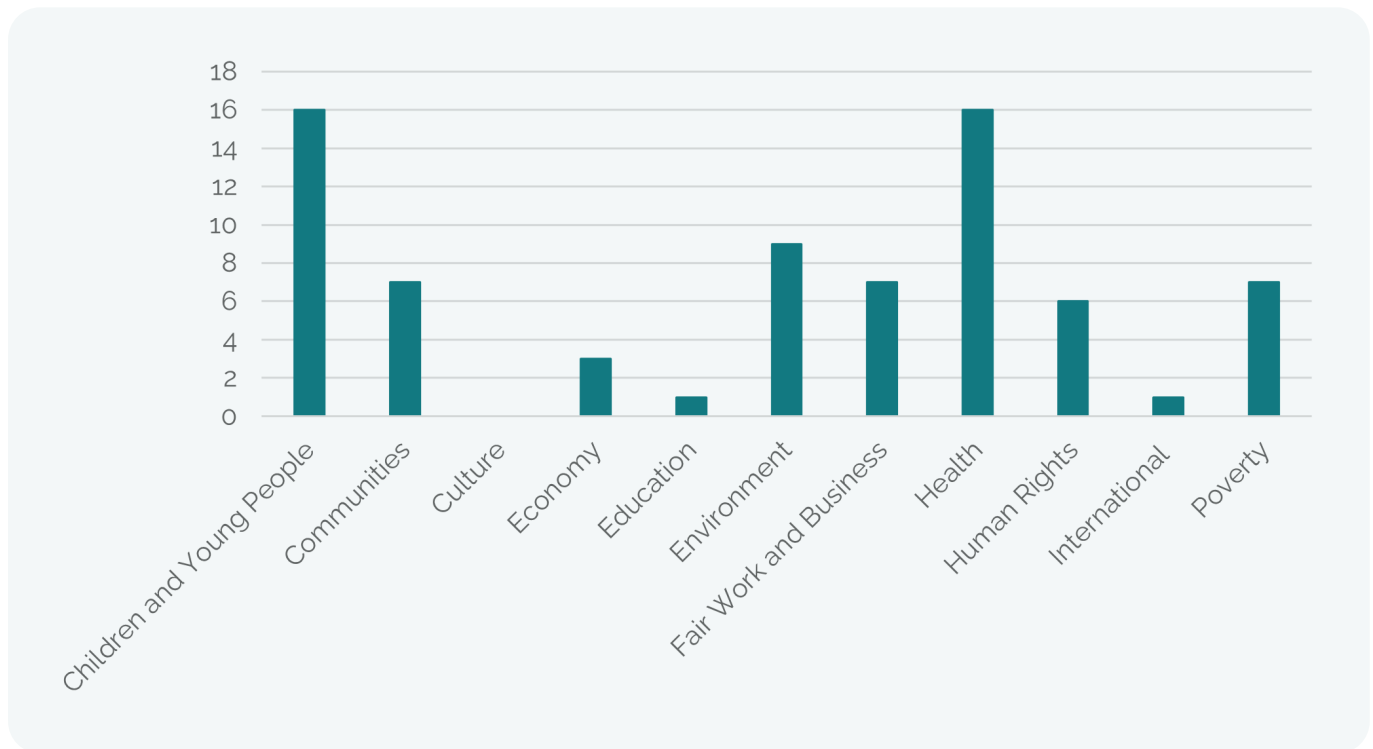


Q2 Does anything make you feel stressed or anxious in your life currently?

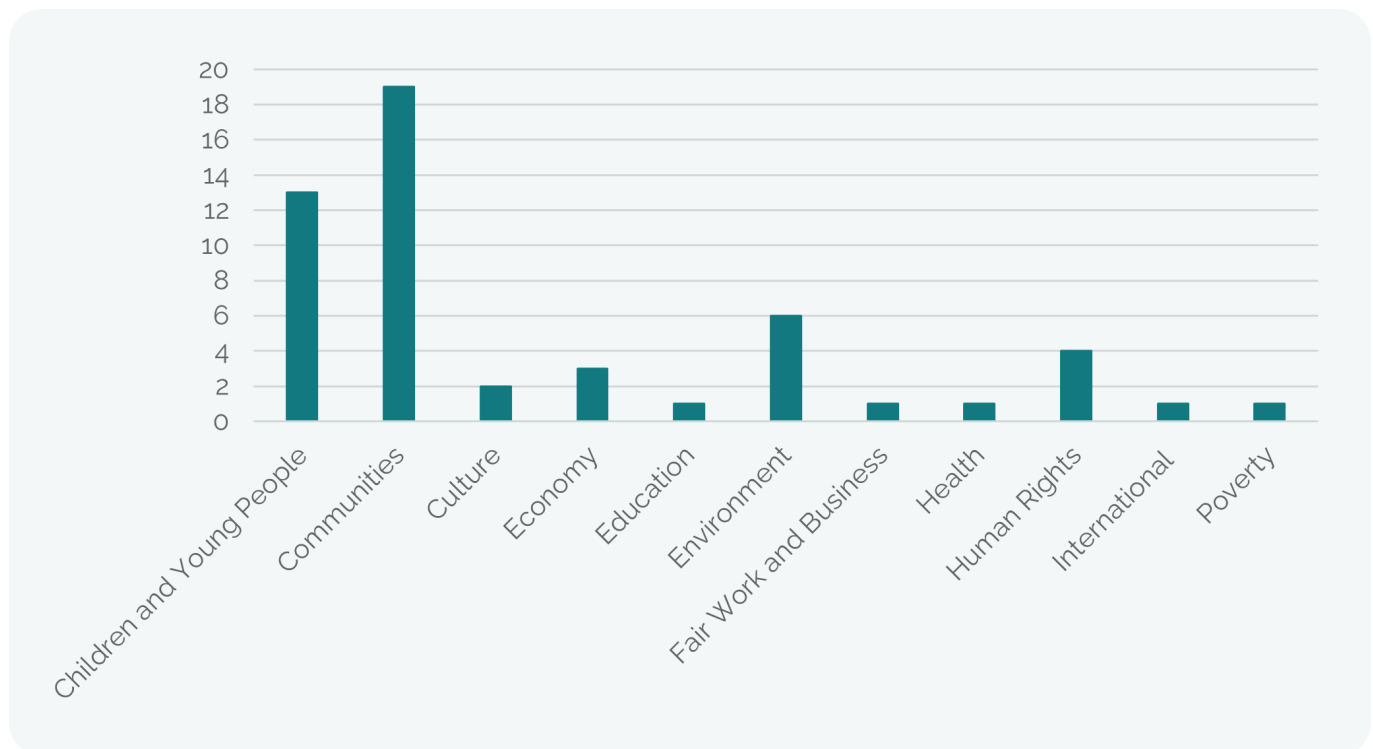


<sup>6</sup> In the interests of space, these charts use the short-hand for each of the eleven National Outcomes. For the full description (e.g. Children and Young People: We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential) please see <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes>

Q3 What are you personally most worried about in the next 10 years?



Q4 What gives you hope or makes you feel optimistic about the next 10 years?





## Factors missing from the National Outcomes

The open questions from the pre-workshop questionnaire highlighted some key areas that are currently under or unrepresented in the National Outcomes and National Indicators. Factors that people talked about included: the pressures of modern life; the quality of their social connections; levels of trust in politics and politicians; social division; artificial intelligence; hobbies and interests; and the strength of relationships with close family and friends. These initial findings clearly need further interrogation and corroboration across a much wider sample of participating communities. Despite this, they do begin to draw out the broader spectrum of things that people consider most important for their wellbeing. This indicates a critical need to deeply engage with people to understand what matters to them and thus to Scotland as a whole.

## 5. Our next steps

At this point the Conversations for Scotland initiative is only beginning to take shape. However, the feedback that we have received so far suggests that there is an appetite for this kind of conversation among the organisations in our networks and the communities they work with. Having tested the model, our immediate next step is to refine the playbook based on feedback from facilitators. This will focus particularly on making the workshops as inclusive as possible, for example with provision for people whose first language is not English.

We then hope to move to a delivery phase, in which we will support people to run workshops in as many communities across Scotland as possible. These conversations will continue to focus on the future that we want for Scotland's future generations. Our aspiration is that the insights gained about the wellbeing priorities of people across Scotland can be used as part of the evidence that shapes national policy on an ongoing basis; it could be used to inform not only the current Review, but also a more continuous assessment of progress in delivering the National Outcomes, the upcoming Wellbeing and Sustainable Development legislation, or any other policy area.

In summary, our collective aspiration in the short to medium term is as follows:

- To enable 100+ conversations in diverse communities across Scotland over the next 12 months;
- To learn more about the wellbeing impacts for people and communities who participate in Conversations for Scotland;
- To collaborate with relevant stakeholders to use these findings to inform policy and decision making, in the Review of National Outcomes and beyond.

In our view, there is a strong appetite for a nationwide movement of civic participatory empowerment with this conducted at scale and on an ongoing basis. We are therefore calling on the Scottish Government to join us in co-creating a rich, diverse and citizen centred engagement practice, fit for the future that Scotland aspires to.



## Appendix 1: thematic analysis methodology description

Template analysis is a structured and versatile method of textual analysis<sup>7</sup> centring around the development of a 'template' prior to analysis, which is used to parse and codify data. A template was created based around the eleven National Outcomes, and used to analyse qualitative data from the four open-ended survey questions. In this approach all statements from participants were codified based on their alignment to a particular national outcome, drawing from their [extended description](#) from the Scottish Government. This enabled us to generate a broad measure of frequency of alignment. Statements were coded to all relevant National Outcomes, so a number of National Outcomes could be aligned to any given statement.

An open section of the template was reserved for statements which did not align straightforwardly with any National Outcome, and referred to a materially different facet of wellbeing. These statements were analysed inductively to look for linkages between non-aligned statements, and thematic clustering used to identify key themes significant to individual and community wellbeing not currently represented in the set of National Outcomes. Workshop post-it note data was analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke<sup>8</sup> through familiarisation with the data and an iterative process of generating codes and themes, review and clarification. Many individual comments had been submitted (over 300 comments with notes sometimes comprising several themes). Themes broadly corresponded with the National Outcomes and where differences existed, they were further reviewed and compared with the questionnaire data. Where issues important to participants seemed to be under-represented in the National Outcomes, these were set aside for further discussion. These themes included Family, Artificial Intelligence, Social Division and a Loss of Trust in Politicians.

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7 Brooks, J., McCluskey, S., Turley, E., King, N. (2015) 'The Utility of Template Analysis in Qualitative Psychology Research' *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12 pp.202–222.

8 Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology.' *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2), pp.77–101.